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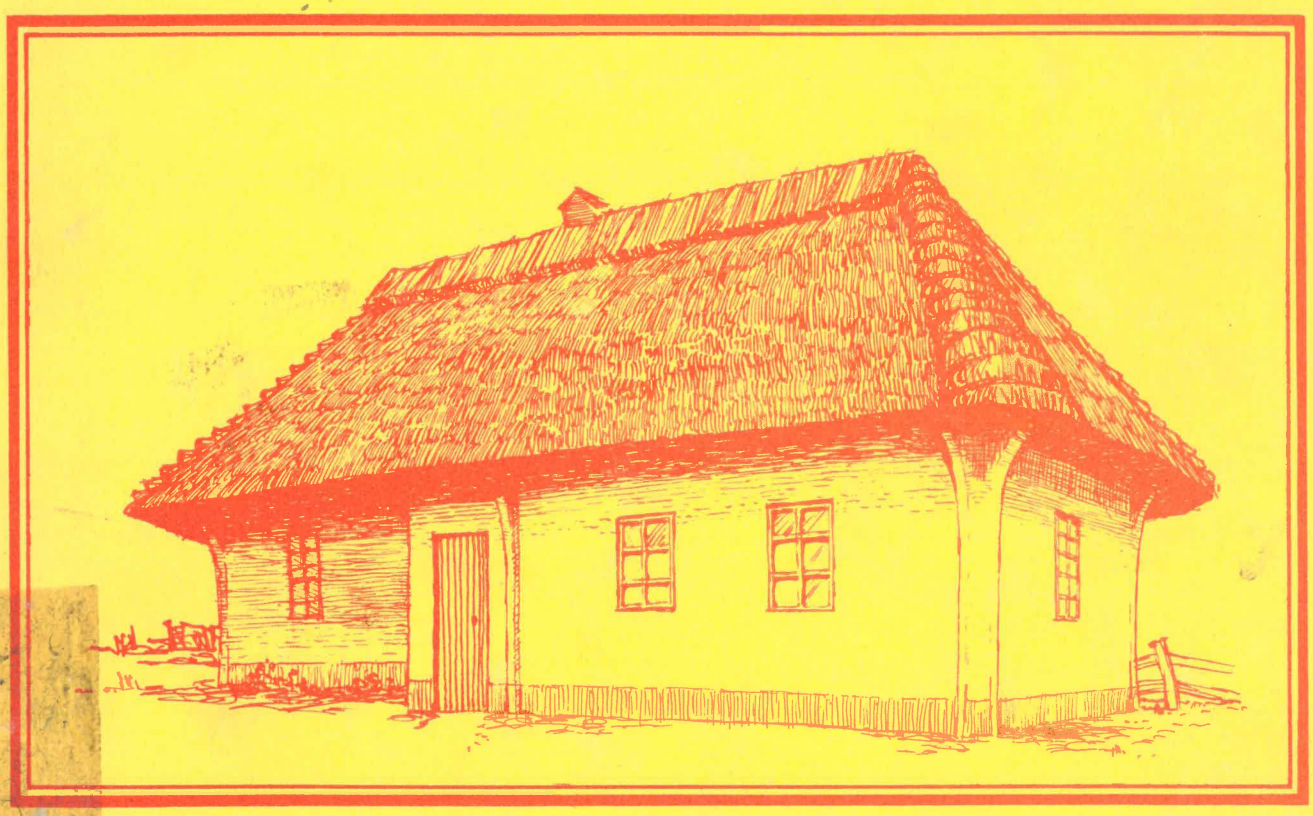
UKRAINIAN VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN ALBERTA

John Lehr



Alberta
CULTURE
Historical Resources

UKRAINIAN VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN ALBERTA

John Lehr

Historic Sites Service
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ABSTRACT

An alternative title to this paper might well be "Building with Logs, Ukrainian Style". The permanent dwellings of the early settlers of Alberta tended to be much the same whatever the ethnic origin of the builder; but the Ukrainian pioneers employed some building techniques and practices which set them apart, to a certain extent, from other in-comers. In isolating and describing these architectural idiosyncrasies, the author shows how they were rooted in the traditional practices of the old country and how these traditions were modified in the new land by environment and exposure to other cultures.

Some of the features of the Ukrainian folk house include the thatched roof (as opposed to the sod roof favoured by other prairies settlers), shaped logs with elaborate work at the corners and eaves, southern orientation, mud stove, and above all the finishing of the house, the mud-and-dung plaster coated with white lime. In addition to describing the technology involved in these practices, the author traces how and why they were modified, changed, or abandoned as the Ukrainian settlers adjusted to life in Alberta.

This is basically a field study. Although the footnotes cite an extensive bibliography, most of the information contained herein was assembled from interviews with surviving pioneers, and direct study of extant buildings. And one thing which this monograph demonstrates is the remarkable durability of the Ukrainian houses. Many of these buildings are still standing; of the 24 plates, all but four are contemporary pictures.

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INTRODUCTION

For the majority of people, a house is the single most important and expensive thing they will ever buy or build. Today, as in the past, no physical object receives greater attention than one's house; its location and size and style. It is indeed a basic cultural expression.

Nowhere is this more true than within a "folk" culture, a peasant economy where the house is more than a shelter, being both a personal and social testament.[1] Yet the study of vernacular architecture, along with the study of other things described as "folk", has been largely ignored in the mainstream of scholarship.[2]

Vernacular Architecture

The study of vernacular architecture, or folk housing is confined to the building styles and forms traditionally employed by a people of a particular heritage. It is not concerned with professionally-designed buildings or elitist architecture, although such buildings may be of indirect interest insofar as they reflect vernacular traits and preferences.

The vernacular tradition seldom lays down rigid codes for the design and construction of dwellings. The folk builder--seldom can he be termed an architect--creates a structure based on generations of practical experience. The forms expressed are those of the community and of the national tradition with which he is imbued.[3] His work reflects the basic qualities of folk building in its concept of function and use of materials. The folk builder works

> not so much functionally as adaptably--that is, not so much consciously thinking out solutions to problems of light, air, and circulation (like a modern architect) as embodying in his work inherited generations of experience with, and adjustment to, local climate, materials and customs.[4]

It is axiomatic that no major changes will occur in domestic house types in most cultures without basic shifts in the culture itself.[5] It follows that the persistence of culture through time and space will be reflected in the house types built by migrants, as man etches his culture into the landscape.[6]

Ukrainian settlers entering Alberta in the 1890s brought with them the folk building traditions of their homeland. Under changing economic, physical and social conditions the Ukrainian vernacular tradition underwent transformation in Alberta. It is the manifestations of that tradition that this paper examines, in both the temporal and spatial context.

Research Methodology

The cultural, social and economic achievements of the Ukrainian settlers in Alberta are well documented,[7] yet little has been written on a basic facet of their folk culture; the nature, form and evolution of their dwellings. Although incidental reference to the distinctive character of the Ukrainian cottage in Alberta has been made by many,[8] a specific concern with the Ukrainian vernacular style is rare. Parfitt, in "Ukrainian Cottages,"[9] gave a superficial account of the pioneer domestic landscape; Kravchuk in "Pershi zhytla ukraintsiv u Kanadi"[10] (The First Dwellings of Ukrainians in Canada) gives a brief and generalized review of Ukrainian pioneer architecture.

The paucity of authoritative literary sources necessitated the adoption of a field-oriented approach and a heavy reliance upon field data. Although this was supplemented to a certain extent by archival research, data gathered in the field constitute the primary source for this study. Field research involved the location and study of folk buildings, and the recordings of verbal traditions through the interviewing of surviving pioneers and others who had a knowledge of the vernacular tradition. The Homestead Files, records of all homestead entries, were utilized to provide background information on the time of settlement, the nationality of the settler, and the quality of the land settled, factors which would have a direct influence upon the type and style of building within an area. Data in the homestead entries also provided a good check upon the reliability of the field data. As, in most instances, the files provide additional data as to the dimensions, building material and value of the initial dwelling, it was frequently possible to ascertain if the existing building was the original or of later construction.

Research Problems

i) Ethnic Nomenclature

Research into aspects of Ukrainian culture encounters a number of unusual problems.[11] A basic confusion over the precise definition of the term "Ukrainian" reduces the usefulness of many data sources. In Western Europe national origin, ethnic origin, and geographical origin are generally synonymous, yet this is seldom so in Eastern Europe. The peoples speaking the Ukrainian language and with a common cultural background were for long a subject people, fragmented, and controlled by a variety of foreign princes. Until 1917, the Ukrainian national state did not exist, and as a result many who were ethnically Ukrainian were content to regard themselves as citizens of the country responsible for the administration of their province. For example, an immigrant from Halychyna might call himself a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and would be recorded as such in the Dominion Census. This resulted in the Ukrainian being recorded in Canadian official documents under a variety of names: Ruthenians (Little Russians), Austrians, Galicians, Bukowinians, Ukrainians, and Russians.[12] This confusion over nomenclature was compounded by the high degree of ethnic intermixing which occurred in the eastern crush zone of Europe, an area of instability and conflict, which provided the first Ukrainian immigrants to Canada.

The vast majority of Ukrainian immigrants to Canada before 1915 came from the provinces of Halychyna and Bukovyna (Figure 1). However, not all Galicians or Bukowinians were ethnically Ukrainian; in Halychyna ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsch), Jews, and Poles were present in considerable numbers, while Bukovyna possessed large Romanian enclaves and was strongly influenced by Romanian culture.

ii) Data Limitations

Ascertaining the date of construction of examples of vernacular architecture was a major difficulty of the field research. Occasionally it proved possible to contact the builder, or close relatives who were aware of the construction date, and so achieve a precise dating in the field. More usually, however, the year of construction was estimated on the

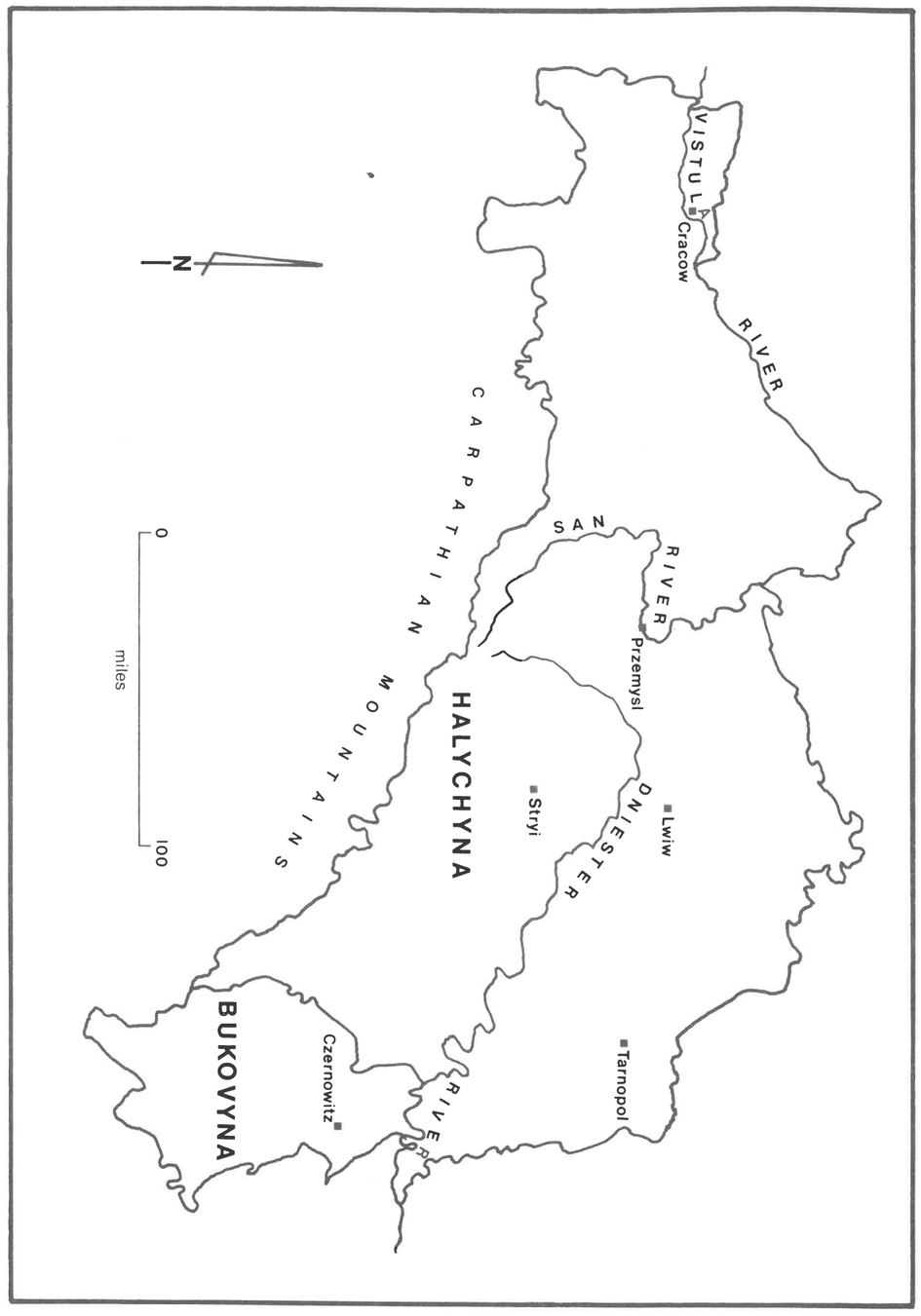

Figure 1 AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN PROVINCES OF HALYCHYNA AND BUKOVYNA (1890 - 1914)

basis of the date of homestead entry and locally-provided information as to the latest possible date of construction (i.e. "before 1910"). Details provided in the homestead entry were especially useful in determining whether the building was the original dwelling or a later replacement.

Similarly, it was not always possible to determine accurately the geographic origin of the builder of any house. Few pioneers of the earlier settlements are alive today and it was found that their descendents often had but a hazy recollection of their ancestral history. The homestead entries were helpful in determining the province of origin of immigrants, but unfortunately their usefulness was diminished by the selective microfilming technique employed in later years. Although every homestead entry was recorded, not every document appertaining to that entry was microfilmed; only about half the entries contained all the required information.

iii) Selection of Study Area

A degree of selectivity was employed in the areas surveyed. The area chosen was selected because it includes a wide variety of terrain in both the physical and economic senses. It embraces some of the earliest areas of Ukrainian settlement and some of the more recent, and, more importantly, includes areas of predominant Galician, Bukowinian, and Romanian settlement (Figure 2). Ideally this research should have encompassed all areas of Alberta settled by Ukrainians, but this was found to be impractical. It is thought that the area selected provided the best possible compromise.

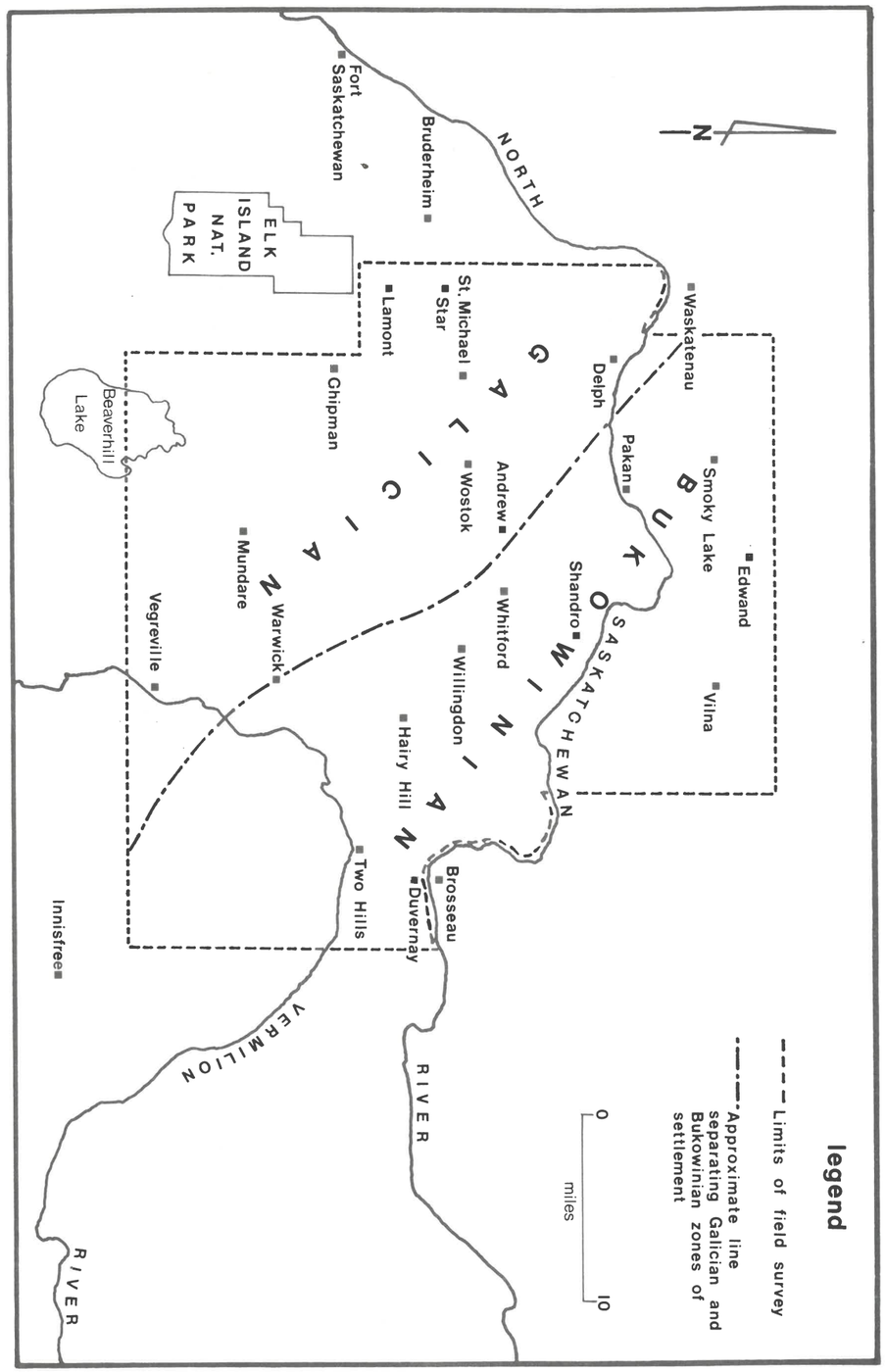

Figure 2 THE STUDY AREA

THE VERNACULAR FORM

Ukrainian Folk Houses

The Ukrainian vernacular house type in Alberta may be briefly described as a rectangular, two-roomed, mud-plastered log house with (initially) a thatched roof. It becomes impractical to attempt the definition of further, more accurate parameters for description. No two Ukrainian folk houses are identical in all respects, individual differences in building materials, design, size and colour scheme creating a wide variation in house personalities. Each Ukrainian folk house is individually unique, yet is readily recognizable as Ukrainian. There is, then, no rigid descriptive model which will apply to all these houses. The Ukrainian vernacular style exists in the cumulation of features which are common to that style. Any one of these common attributes is, in isolation, not inidcative of a Ukrainian background; it is the occurrence of all or some of them within one building which serves to impart the distinctive appearance which we call "Ukrainian".

Design and detail of the folk house in Alberta varied according to factors such as environment, both physical and social and the economic status and the geographic origin of the builder. The Ukrainian from Halychyna built his house after a different pattern than the Ukrainian from Bukovyna, Transcarpathia or Romania. House design underwent gradual changes, as new concepts in building design and style were copied from the surrounding Canadian settlers and as new materials of construction became available.

Building Materials

Both the Ukrainian peasant in Europe and his pioneering counterpart in Alberta constructed their houses using only a limited number of building materials. In most cases the materials at hand in Europe were also available in similar form in the pioneer environment. In Europe, these materials were timber, clay, sand, horse or cow dung, and rye straw; and these, or in the case of rye straw a close substitute, were all available in Alberta. The tools required to erect a peasant house were minimal: a felling axe, a broadaxe for shaping the logs, a saw, and an auger. Most

houses were built without nails, and in the earlier years of settlement were built with only the basic tools of the carpenter.

Although the Ukrainian immigrants entering Alberta between 1892-1915 pioneered new areas of settlement, they did so with a supply base at Edmonton, about forty miles from the initial point of settlement at Star. For those with money, more sophisticated construction materials were at hand, but few could afford such luxuries, the average Ukrainian pioneer suffering an acute shortage of capital for some years after his arrival. Some anticipated a restricted economy to the extent of carrying among their personal effects such items as window frames, glass, and hinges taken from their houses in Europe.[13]

Construction

In the pioneer environment, the majority of the houses were constructed by more than one person or family. The effort necessary to fell, scale, carry and raise logs into position called for the co-operation of neighbours. The tendency of kinship groups to settle in close proximity, often on adjacent quarters, facilitated this. Galicians and Bukowinians settling in different parts of Alberta, all those involved in the raising of a house would tend to be from the same cultural milieu, ensuring the perpetuation of the regional characteristics of the vernacular style.

As a method of gathering together the necessary labour, it was usual to hold a toloka, a "bee". Especially this was done for the purpose of plastering the log exterior, a task traditionally undertaken by the women. Through this collective approach, the time taken to build the average house could be as little as two or three days, with a few days added in order to allow the plaster to dry.

Site

The survey system utilized on the prairie divided the land into townships, each of which was subdivided into 36 sections of one square mile each. Every section was divided into four quarter-sections of 160 acres, and the quarter section became the basic unit of land in the west. Under the Homestead Act of 1872, a settler could obtain a quarter-section of

Figure 3. Inferior aspen log used in wall construction.

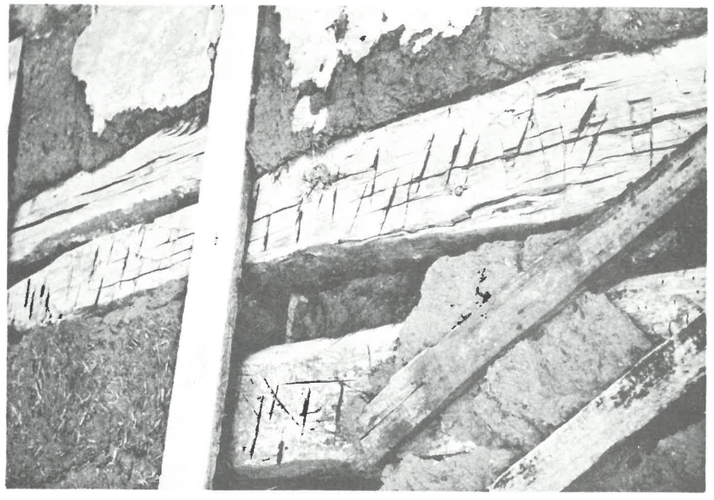

Figure 4. Shaped log. Broadaxe markings are clearly visible, also angled wood strips attached to log to provide purchase for plaster.

Figure 6. Notched log jointing

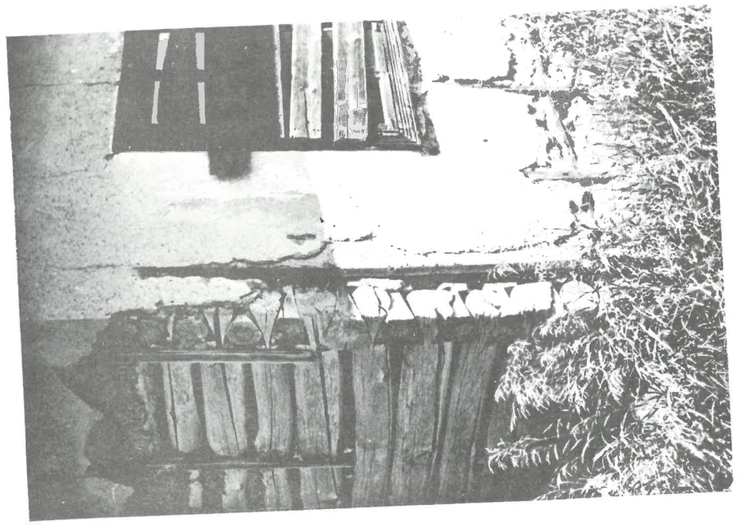

Figure 5. Dovetail jointing

land for the nominal sum of ten dollars. Full title to the land was not granted until the settler had met with certain requirements of improvements and residence. This system of survey tended to spread people out and precluded the establishment of agricultural village settlement. The Ukrainians were basically a village-oriented people, familiar with a strongly nucleated settlement system in their homeland. Being physically unable to create a village-style settlement they settled wherever possible upon adjacent quarters, sometimes locating in close proximity at the centre of a section. More usually the Ukrainian homestead was isolated and located upon a slight rise so as to secure good drainage.

Orientation

The Ukrainian folk house was always oriented to the south. This may have been partially for reasons of environment (in Alberta, at least, the southern exposure gets the most sun); more likely it was founded in religion and the unvarying floor plan of the house (Figure 22). Traditionally the interior end wall of the larger room (the room without the stove) was decorated with icons and religious calendars, and always faced east. This ensured the house's southern orientation.

Foundations and Wall Construction

True foundations were rarely found in the Ukrainian folk house. In almost all cases the house rested upon a series of large stones placed under the lowest log, raising the log away from contact with the ground and preventing subsequent rot. Wood sills were seldom employed.

The materials employed for wall construction varied according to the physical environment. Ukrainian pioneers settling the sparsely wooded prairie of Saskatchewan used a type of "wattle and daub", a base of willow lathes interwoven between a series of upright logs.[14] However, most Ukrainian settlement in Alberta took place in the well-wooded aspen-parkland region and timber was always available. Accordingly it was possible to employ an all-log building technique. Because it was not practical to haul timber over great distances, the choice of wood was

determined by the immediate availability of species. Although pine or spruce was preferred, other types were used extensively, aspen being most commonly employed. In areas possessing good pine stands aspen was seldom used for house construction; after the exhaustion of the pine it was used for the construction of barns and sheds (Figure 3). Ideally, timber was cut, scaled, and seasoned one year before use. Wherever possible, logs of eight to ten inches in diameter were used for wall construction; again, it was only later, after the larger logs had been used up, that inferior aspen of four to six inches diameter was employed (Figure 3). The logs were often shaped by flattening two sides with a broadaxe (Figure 4). This was, however, confined to the better quality, broader diameter type of log.

Horizontal log construction was employed in all the houses examined for this study.[15] The corners of the logs interlocked by means of a dovetail joint (Figure 5) or by simple saddle notching (Figure 6). To impart a greater stability to the basic log structure, wooden pegs of one to one-and-one-half inches diameter were driven through augered holes, pinning together two or three logs. Openings in the log wall for windows and doors were sawn after the lower logs were pinned together.

Ceiling and Roof Construction

Log beams (generally squared) were laid at intervals of approximately three feet across the topmost log, at right angles to the main or long side. There were pinned to the upper log by wooden stakes driven through augered holes (Figure 7). Poplar poles were then laid across these beams at intervals of two or three inches and the intervening gaps plugged with twists of mud, straw and cow dung. This constituted an effective roof insulation. In one instance this insulation had been improved by the addition of a further layer of empty bottles embedded in a matrix of clay and dung. Crude but effective.

The roof framework varied in design according to the type of roof employed. A thatched roof necessitated a high roof pitch for rapid run-off. Shingles gave greater flexibility as to high, low, or medium pitch (Figure 8), whereas a turf or sod roof required a low pitch (Figure 9), in order to keep the sods on the roof.

Figure 7. Roof pegging at eave. Stepped eave bracket at left.

Figure 8. Galician homestead on old Athabasca Landing Trail, 1912. Note the varied roof pitch in accordance with differing roofing materials: sod roof - low pitch, shingle - medium pitch, and thatch - high pitch.
(Ernest Brown Collection, Provincial Museum and Archives, Alberta.)

Figure 9. Sod roofed Galician homestead, Alberta.
(Ernest Brown Collection, Provincial Museum and Archives, Alberta.)

Figure 10. Bukowinian house type with hipped gable roof.

Figure 11. Wood lathes attached to shaped logs afforded purchase for mud plaster.

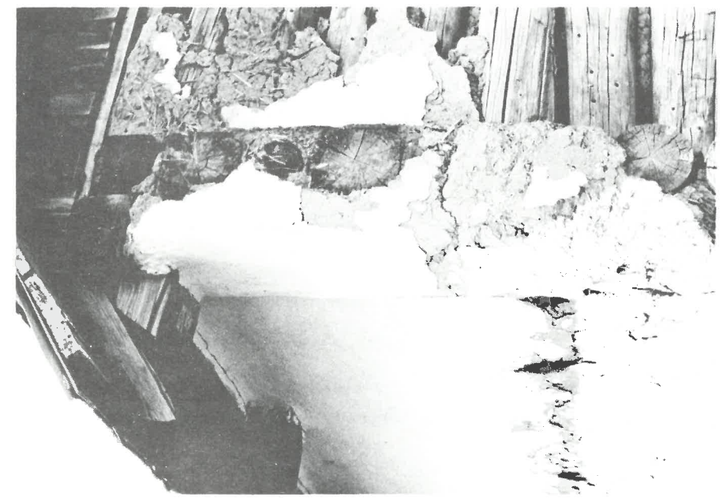

Figure 13. Mud plaster on round logs.

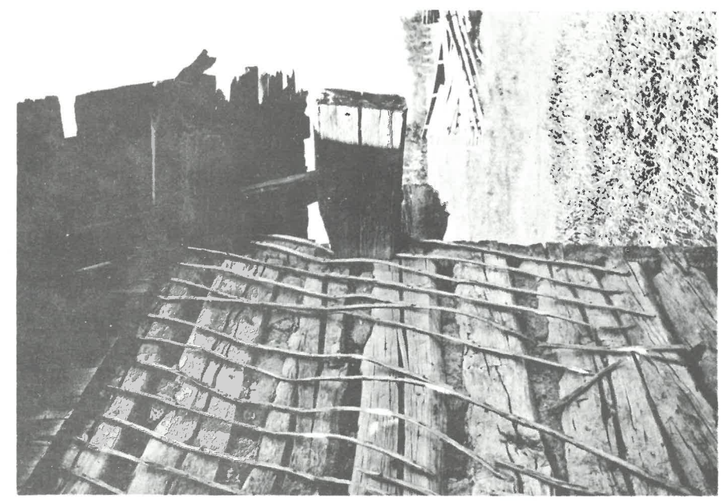

Figure 12. Willow lathes on shaped log walls

The roof material also affected the roof shape. Thatching is relatively easy on a hipped roof, but a gable roof presents certain problems to the thatcher. For this reason a hipped or hipped gable (Figure 10) would be employed if the roof was to be thatched. It is probable that the latter form was popular as a compromise between the ease of thatching the hipped roof, and the simpler construction of the gable-typed roof.

Poplar poles of four or five inches diameter placed at two-and-a-half-to three-foot intervals and lashed to a centre pole of the same size constituted the major load-bearing roof framework. Added rigidity was given by use of collar ties, and by pegging the roof supports to the upper log of the wall and/or the ceiling cross beams (Figure 7). Small diameter poplar poles were lashed or nailed horizontally across the major rafters at two-foot intervals, in order to impart further rigidity and to provide a purchase for the tying of thatch or fastening of shingles.

Mud Plaster

Unlike the log dwelling of other settlers in Alberta, those of the Ukrainians were invariably plastered with a coating of mud. Mud was utilized by others for chinking the rough hewn timber used in cabin construction, but only the Slavs encased the entire timber structure with a protective covering of mud mixed with straw and animal dung, and lime. Generally log walls required no preparation prior to the application of plaster; the undulations in the log-wall surface afforded sufficient purchase. In the case of squared logs, additional purchase was afforded by the attachment of wood lathes to the wall, usually at a 45^{0} angle (Figures 11 and 12).

House plastering was a communal effort and it was usual for a toloka to be held for that purpose. The composition of the plaster was the subject of much disagreement amongst the pioneers interviewed for this study.[16] However, it generally consisted of three distinct layers: a primary coat of one or two inches thickness, a secondary coat of ¼" thickness, and an outer covering of active lime (Figure 13).

Mud plaster was an initial mixture of clay and water, pounded by the feet or by oxen to break down the clay, with straw and horse or cow dung added later. The straw was chopped finely and its purpose, like that of

the animal dung, was to prevent the plaster from cracking upon drying. The viscous mixture was applied directly to the logs and smoothed over in a rough fashion. A secondary layer of clay and water, with a little sand added, was applied over the first to give a finely smoothed coating ready for liming. After drying, and the patching of any cracks, the plaster was limed with a mixture of active lime and water, often with skim milk or a little washing blue added to bring out the pure whiteness of the lime.

The lime fulfilled a dual function. It was decorative and it helped to protect the clay from rainwash, extending the life of the plaster. The plaster required constant maintenance because it had a tendency to crack, and although long-lasting when well maintained, it deteriorated rapidly if neglected. Two great hazards to the plaster were children and fowl, the former damaging the interior and the latter pecking at the lime on the lower reaches of the exterior. To prevent this many houses had sawn shiplap laid over the plaster up to the level of the window sill.

Liming of the plaster was done annually, traditionally immediately before the Easter celebration as part of the general preparations for the festival.

Roofing

A variety of materials were employed as roofing agents. For the first crude shack or shelter, sod was utilized (Figure 9). Positioned grass side upwards, sod provided a passable roof during the winter months but the onset of summer led to problems of water seepage. It was, therefore, a short term solution to roofing and in the wooded areas was seldom employed. The traditional roof covering was a rye straw thatch, although in 1908 in Halychyna and Bukovyna, thatch was proscribed as a roofing material because of the fire hazard, and sheet iron roofing began to make an appearance.[17] However, in the Alberta pioneer environment thatch was widely used. Although a fire hazard, it had the advantage of being cheap and easy to construct. A well-thatched roof was waterproof and provided a good insulation. With regular attention a thatch would last up to forty years.

As rye straw was not initially available, many thatches were made

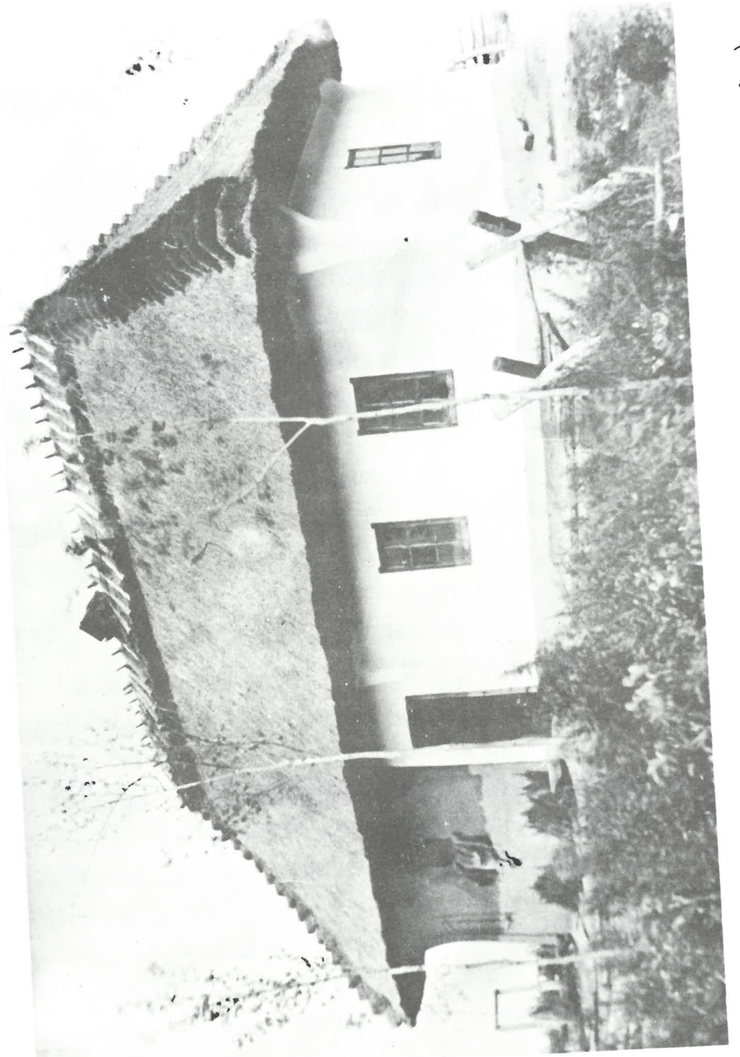

Figure 14. "Russian thatched house" - actually a Ukrainian (Bukowinian) folk house.
(Ernest Brown Collection, Provincial Museum and Archives, Alberta.)

using broad-bladed prairie slough grass. Bunches of grass were pulled or cut, knotted and one end tied around a roof lathe, the free end of the bundle being laid over the lower lathes.[18] A competent thatcher could produce a neat and well-trimmed thatch (Figure 14) but photographs of early pioneer dwellings indicate that many thatches were makeshift affairs, untrimmed and with the thatch held down with long poles from the ground to the roof (Figure 15).

Although thatch was the most commonly used roofing material in the early years of settlement, few of these roofs have survived. The only thatches examined for this study were on abandoned buildings and were in poor condition. Wood shingles had replaced thatch by the 1920s, indeed in many areas shingles had become popular in the 1890s. Many of the old thatches disappeared in 1919, when they were bought up by Edmonton businessmen intending to use the straw for feed during a fodder shortage.

Stoves

The stove (pich) was a major part of the Ukrainian folk house. It was large, occupying almost half of the area of the west room, and its large, flat upper surfaces were used as a sleeping area by the elderly and children. Its solid (mud) construction enabled it to store heat, and it provided an area of constant heat during the winter nights.

Because of their size many of these old stoves were replaced by smaller iron stoves and ranges and consequently are rarely found today. During the course of this study only one example of a completely preserved stove was found.[19]

Evacuation of smoke from the stove presented some problems for the earlier settlers, because stove piping was not always available. In the absence of piping, mud heavily daubed upon a framework of willow lathes formed a crude chimney. Some built a short chimney only, sufficient to take the smoke fumes above the ceiling level, where it was left to filter out through the thatch. It seems that the eyebrow vents located on the southern slope of the roofs of Bukowinian and Romanian types of house initially served the purpose of smoke evacuation (Figures 16 and 17). The eyebrow vent is found however, on houses now possessing shingle and tile roofs, and on houses with brick chimneys. Although the logical

Figure 15. "Ivan Lupul's home at Wostok, Alberta." A Galician type circa 1902. (Glenbow Foundation, Calgary.)

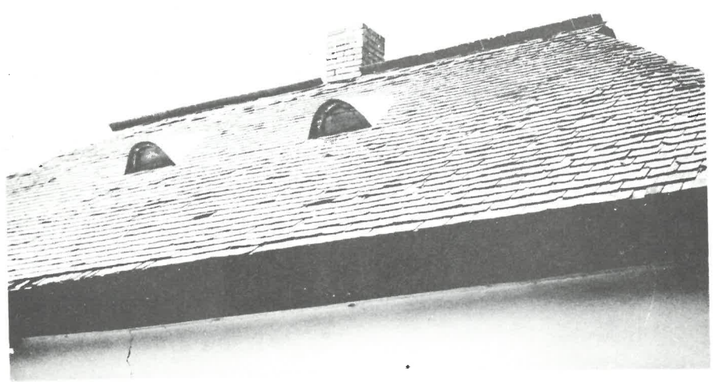

Figure 16. Eyebrow vents.

conclusion is that these vents were for simple ventilation purposes, many Bukowinians insist that the initial function of the eyebrow vent was as a chimney.[20] If so, its survival must be interpreted as a cultural anachronism. In some cases, these vents have been modified to small dormers (Figure 18).

Floors

Practically all the early cottages had earth floors. Composed of hard stamped mud swept clean of loose dirt, the earth floor was given a regular weekly coating of a mixture of cow dung and water, which upon drying, gave a polished effect not unlike that of modern composition flooring.

Decorative Preferences

The Ukrainian cottage, mud plastered, was almost always coated with white lime.[21] A generous amount of washing blue was frequently added to the lime to create a sky-blue colour; this was applied along the lower portions of the walls. Patterns were occasionally traced out in blue over the white of the lime. Preferred colours for decorative trim are difficult to determine, although it appears that sky blue and yellow were favoured.[22] Among Bukowinian and Romanian houses green was frequently employed for the painting of trim. Many of the persons canvassed stated that the Bukowinian settler generally preferred brighter colours for paint work, while others claimed that Romanian houses were recognizable by their vivid red trim, but no field evidence was found to substantiate these claims.

Figure 17. Bukowinian house type with hipped roof and eyebrow vents.

Figure 18. Modification of eyebrow vents into small dormers on a Romanian style house, Sandy Lake, Alberta.

VARIANTS OF THE VERNACULAR

Vernacular Styles

Gowans[23] has commented upon the fundamental similarity of most peasant housing, maintaining that folk architects will ultimately arrive at similar solutions to the problems of dwelling design and provision of shelter. Though different cultures evolve certain stylistic characteristics of their own, their dwellings remain fundamentally similar, solid, unpretentious and timeless. So it is that although differences may be discerned in the folk architecture of Ukrainians from Halychyna or Bukovyna, such variations are essentially superficial.

The Spatial Context: Separation of Styles

Because of historical and political factors in Europe, the first Ukrainian settlers in Canada came almost exclusively from the then Austro-Hungarian province of Halychyna. In 1892 Galician settlers began to establish themselves in the Star-Wostok area of Alberta. It was not until after 1896 that Bukowinian settlers began to enter Alberta and settle land to the north and east of the Galician settlement.[24] Thus, although there was some intermixing, the areas of settlement of Bukowinians and Galicians remained fairly distinct (Figure 2). Those pioneers from Transcarpathia and northern Romania generally settled within the Bukowinian area of settlement, sometimes creating their own distinct enclaves of settlement.

The folk architecture of these various Ukrainian groups shows many differences, perhaps as a result of the strong Polish influences in Halychyna and the strong Romanian influences in Bukovyna. The ethnic images of the Bukowinians and Galicians were in some ways reflected in their building traditions. The Galicians regarded the Bukowinians as being unsophisticated and bucolic--rural "hayseeds"; while the Bukowinians had their own stories of the thrifty and miserly nature of the Galicians. It is possible to see traces of these traits in the respective vernacular styles.

The Galician style of architecture betrayed less evidence of its Eastern European folk origins than did the Bukowinian style. The Bukowinian style was generally more decorative and appeared indeed to be

somewhat more bucolic in spirit. Such impressions may of course have been created through the later immigration of the Bukowinians and their settlement of more marginal land. However, the failure of the earlier Galician dwellings to display the same degree of stylistic ornamentation and elegance, suggests that the vernacular tradition in Halychyna at the time of emigration was not as entrenched in Bukovyna and that the Galician vernacular style was closer to the more sober and familiar vernacular styles of northwestern Europe. To the untrained eye the Bukowinian and Romanian house types are indistinguishable. Certain differences do exist, however, notably a more extreme form of roof overhang in the Romanian Style, giving a more pronounced eave projection and a greater upward flaring of the supporting buttresses.

The Bukowinian Vernacular Style

Those dwellings erected by Bukowinian pioneers were characterised by a heavy hipped roof with wide overhanging eaves. The eaves projection was especially pronounced along the southern facade (Figure 19) often being supported by a number of wooden uprights (usually four) to form a porch. On certain houses the eave projection was as great as three feet at sides and rear, and four to five feet at the front, but such excessive projection was not usual. The norm was a more moderate projection of about two feet six inches at the front, slightly less at the rear and sides. In most cases the fascia was closed by a flat soffit so that no rafters were exposed, although ceiling joists were sometimes left visible on the underside of the soffit. This was not a general rule and many examples of roofs without fascia or soffit were observed (see Figure 7).

A general characteristic of most Bukowinian dwellings was the distinctive eave bracket, or roof support, formed by the outward flaring of the topmost logs of the walls (see Figures 7, 10, 14 and 20). The degree of flare was dependent upon the extent of eave projection. Styles of eave brackets varied, the majority being in the form of a smooth, outward, and slightly convex curve (Figure 14), others being stepped (Figure 7). Eyebrow vents were characteristic of Bukowinian and Romanian houses (Figures 16 and 17) and were not observed on any Galician dwellings. The presence of carved detail on projecting exposed ends of wooden beams

Figure 20. Eave bracket and eave detail. House of John Shandro, Shandro, Alberta

Figure 19. Bukowinian house type; extensive roof projection on southern facade.

was also a characteristic confined to the Bukowinian and Romanian house.

It was found that Bukowinian and Romanian houses tended to be larger than the Galician. Even in areas where the Bukowinians occupied marginal land, they still constructed substantial dwellings. Dimensions were usually in the order of 35 x 18 feet.

The buildings of Bukowinians originating from the sub-Carpathian region of Bukovyna were frequently left unplastered. These people from the Carpathian foothills were accustomed to building with good timber which did not need the protective sheathing of mud plaster. As they settled an area of Alberta where good pine stands were accessible, they were able to continue their building tradition. Such families as the Shandros of Shandro, Alberta, utilized excellent timber and never plastered the exterior of their buildings. This tradition has been accounted as a trait of the Hutzels, adopted by Bukowinian peasants who lived close to the Carpathians and who were strongly influenced by the Hutzel culture.

The Galician Vernacular Style

The Galician folk house while basically the same as the Bukowinian type in construction and form, differed in matters of detail. It was a more sober utilitarian dwelling, less flamboyant than the Bukowinian style.

The roof of the Galician house type did not have the pronounced degree of projection of the eaves and as a consequence appeared to be less heavy than that of the other style. The difference is clearly shown by a comparison of Figure 21, showing an example of the Galician style, with that of Figures 10, 17 and 19 all of which illustrate the heavy roofed appearance of the Bukowinian house.

Most Galician houses with the gable roof had a distinctive pent extension (Figure 21) located on the gable end at the eave level. This was a protective feature, designed to prevent heavy rainwash from damaging the mud plaster on the wall below. The gable end itself was not plastered, being generally filled with vertical weatherboard, a trait which according to Weslager[25] has German antecedents. Eave brackets in the form of outwardly flared upper wall logs were not present on the Galician house because the absence of an extensive eave projection rendered them redundant.

A high portion of Galician cottages were of the smaller two room type, without a central hallway. This type of dwelling was predominant in areas of Galician settlement regardless of the prosperity of the area.

Figure 21. Galician house type, Peno, Alberta.

FORM, FUNCTION AND ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Adaptation

The Ukrainian folk house was well-adapted to the extremes of a continental climate, and was therefore a successful transplant to the Canadian prairie environment. Sturdy log construction and excellent insulation provided by the exterior and interior sheathing of mud plaster made the Ukrainian cottage warm in winter and cool in the summer. The early Ukrainian pioneers of Alberta owed much of their early success to the practical design of their dwelling.

Surprisingly, many Ukrainian old-timers held strong opinions on the respective merits of the Galician and Bukowinian styles. Generally the Bukowinian design was regarded as superior, even by those of Galician ancestry. It proved difficult to ascertain exact reasons for this opinion.

The Bukowinian style has certain advantages which would enhance its utility in the pioneer environment. The wide eave projection afforded a greater degree of protection against rainwash on the walls, rendering the mud plaster less open to erosion. A convenient shade area, or porch, on the south-facing facade was provided by the extensive eave projection along the house front. Apart from such practical considerations it is possible that aesthetic considerations favoured the Bukowinian style, in that, to the majority of Ukrainians regardless of their provincial origin, the Bukowinian house simply looked more attractive.

The extreme cold of the Alberta winter revealed certain design defects in the Ukrainian folk house. The larger houses possessing a central hallway (see Figure 22) were difficult to heat adequately during periods of extreme cold unless additional stoves were brought into operation.[26] The location of the stove in the west room meant that heat transference across to the east room was barely sufficient during cold weather. As an attempt to rectify this, the stove pipe (on houses with the modern wood-burning stove) was run horizontally across the hallway ceiling and for a short distance into the east room before being turned upwards.

A considerable, though rapidly diminishing, number of folk style cottages are still occupied in areas of Ukrainian settlement. Many, for reasons outlined above, are occupied only on a seasonal basis, though this is also connected to contemporary patterns of agricultural activity in certain types of farming.

It was generally found that so long as the outer sheathing of mud plaster was well-maintained and remained intact, the house's insulation was good. If neglected, or if broken or cracked plaster was patched over with modern sheathing materials rather than being correctly repaired with mud, dung, and water, the quality of insulation suffered drastically. In one instance the occupant of such a dwelling complained that snow filtered through a chipboard sheathing, the old (cracked) mud plaster, and the log wall into the house interior.[27]

The true value of this vernacular construction was realized by many only after some years of settlement, when Ukrainians, for the first time, began to abandon the traditional building forms and materials. Poorly insulated frame buildings were found to be no substitute for the tried vernacular dwellings. Many Ukrainian families underwent extreme hardship in their new "improved" modern dwellings and in the words of one old-timer, "many near froze to death."[28]

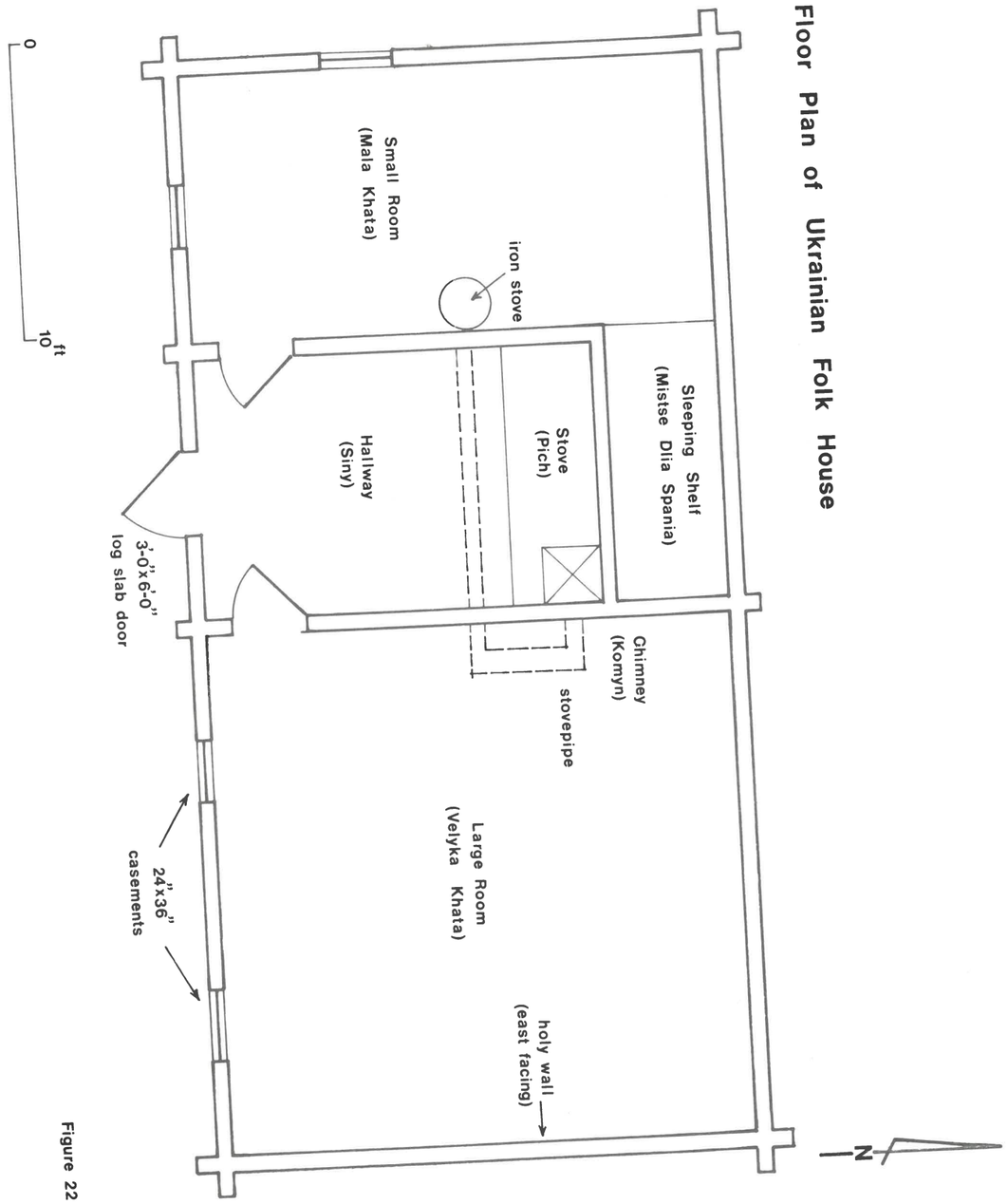

Figure 22

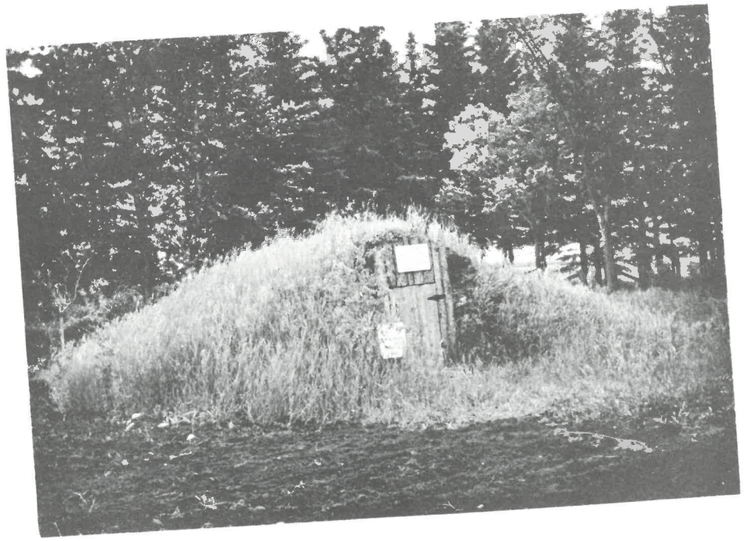

Figure 23. Reconstructed dug-out, Shandro Pioneer Museum.

Figure 24. Transitional style house. Canadianization of the vernacular form.

MODIFICATION OF THE VERNACULAR STYLE

House Type Sequence in Alberta

Recorded in the design, form and construction of every house are the social values and economic status of the builder. Perceptions of what is desirable in terms of house design and house size change as social values and economic circumstances change.

The most prominent manifestations of folk culture within the rural environment are language, dress, and dwelling. It is these three facets of culture which most readily reflect changes in attitude toward established values in folk culture. In terms of immigrant society, this is especially true where conformity to new values is the necessary prelude to integration and assimilation. Because of this, it is possible to parallel the decline of Ukrainian folk culture with the modification and adaptation of folk building traditions.

Initial Shelter

The first dwelling for the Ukrainian pioneer was usually a primitive, hastily-erected structure designed to afford temporary shelter until such time as a more substantial permanent dwelling could be built. Tents were used during the summer months, but they were inadequate in winter, and dugouts were employed to provide temporary shelter. Termed a zemlyanka by the Galicians, and a borday by the Bukowinians, the dugout was a pit sunk a few feet below ground and roofed over with aspen boughs and sods (Figure 23). When equipped with a stove it provided a warm, secure dwelling for the winter months.

The Folk House

Within a short time of taking up his homestead, the Ukrainian pioneer erected a permanent dwelling, usually in the vernacular tradition of his homeland. Few departures from traditional design and construction were attempted, unless necessitated by material deficiencies, as, for example, with the substitution of slough grass for rye and straw in the thatching process.

In many instances, a second, more carefully-constructed, house was built alongside the initial building if the pioneer's economic progress permitted. Built usually a few years after the original, this second house was basically the same as the first, differing only in size, sophistication of construction, and type of roof covering. The adoption of shingles often meant a lowering of the roof pitch (Figure 8). Usually the first house was left standing and used for storage or as a cooking shelter.

Stylistic Change

Changes in the vernacular style were slow to appear in Alberta. With the bulk of settlement taking place in a block along the Star-Vermilion axis, integration and assimilation of Ukrainians into the Canadian community was slowed, and cultural values and styles remained essentially unchanged for many years. It is apparent that even in the earlier established areas of Galician settlement in the Star-Wostok region, little "Canadianization" had taken place after twenty years of settlement.[29] The Ukrainian community was culturally pure, linguistically and architecturally. Minor alterations in the vernacular style, such as the lower roof pitch associated with the adoption of shingles, were little more than an environmental adaption, a trend which would probably have been paralleled in Europe but for the chronic shortage of timber.[30]

During the period of 1914 - 1925, agricultural markets were good and prices high, and the material prosperity of the Ukrainian farmer increased dramatically. This new-found wealth often brought about the building of a new house; larger and more Canadianized than the earlier folk house.[31] For the first time the vernacular tradition was not strictly adhered to, though neither was it completely abandoned. The result was an architectural ethnic hybrid.

Certain aspects of the traditional design were incorporated into the new buildings, which often made a conscious effort to embrace Canadian styles. The southern orientation of the building was retained, perhaps unconsciously; the rectangular form of the building was unchanged and the interior room layout remained basically unaltered. However, most of these transitional style houses were changed in appearance through the addition of an extra half-storey, or in some cases, a full storey (Figures

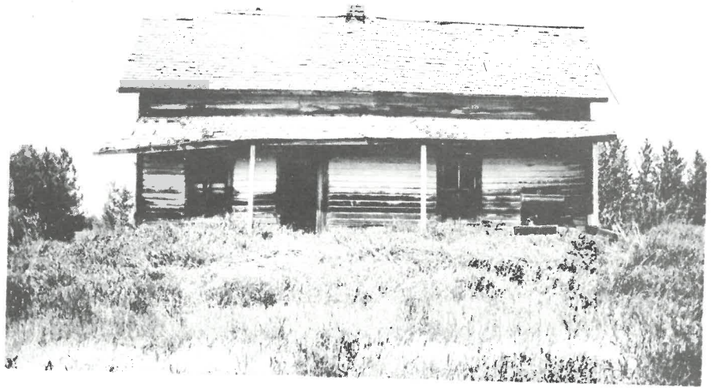

Figure 25. Transitional style house.

Figure 26. Store at Delph, Alberta. A blend of two traditions, this building incorporates the Ukrainian vernacular style with the "boom town" false front.

24 and 25). This served to destroy the distinctively "low browed" appearance so characteristic of the Ukrainian vernacular style. Yet in effect it was the superficial which was abandoned, the basic elements of the folk design were retained without serious modification. In areas of Bukowinian settlement, for example, the wide eave projection was absent from buildings of this period, but the eave function was continued in the wide front porch (Figures 24 and 25).

Though styles had changed, the materials of construction altered little. In the way of construction materials, little more was available to the Ukrainian farmer in 1920 than had been available to the pioneer twenty years previously. Concrete may have been used for foundation, replacing the wood sill or stone foundation, but little else had changed. The basic building material was timber, usually aspen, and, as before, the Ukrainian house of the 1920s was constructed of corner notched or dovetailed horizontal logs sheathed in a layer of mud plaster, limed on the exterior. Though overlaid with other styles, the transitional dwelling remained structurally unaltered, although it lost much of its ethnic flavour when later sheathed in shiplap or weatherboard. This often occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s (see Figures 24 and 25), but even then a little of the character was retained, through the practice of painting white any siding put on over the limed exterior.

On occasion incongruous hybrid structures resulted from the blending of the Ukrainian vernacular with North American building fashions. One such example may be seen at Delph, Alberta, where the solitary store incorporates a boom-town false front with a building erected in the traditional manner (Figure 26).

Survival of the Vernacular Style

The Ukrainian vernacular tradition did not survive into any subsequent generation of building. For all intents and purposes it died in Alberta during the interwar years. The building styles which began to manifest themselves on Ukrainian homesteads in the years following World War II, showed little evidence of the vernacular tradition. Architect-designed ranch-style houses have replaced the more picturesque cottages and houses of previous years. Yet in some ways traces of the vernacular

Figure 27. Temporal evolution in house styles; farmstead near Mundare, Alberta, 1972. 1) initial folk house, 2) transitional style, 3) modern ranch-style bungalow.

linger on, often unsuspected and unrecognized.

One is often struck by the bright, almost gaudy, paintwork so frequently found on Ukrainian farmsteads, blue, yellow, and white predominating over other colours. Blue roofing material is widely employed by Ukrainian farmers, and whatever the motive, has become a characteristic of areas with a high Ukrainian population. The south-facing orientation of the folk house has often been retained for modern dwellings, though more from functional rather than traditional reasons.

The house-type sequence found upon many Ukrainian farmsteads in Alberta is illustrated in Figure 27. Here, as in many similar cases, the practice of using abandoned dwellings for other purposes has resulted in the survival of four generations of farm dwellings.

Although the Ukrainian architectural tradition is dead in Alberta, its legacy is still present in the landscape of rural areas settled and occupied by Ukrainians. Many houses built in the folk tradition still survive, a few still operative. But the majority have been abandoned: rural depopulation, farm abandonment and neglect have all contributed to their demise as an element in the cultural landscape of Alberta. Unless conscious efforts at preservation are initiated, few examples will survive into the next decade.

To a certain degree generalization is inevitable when dealing with the complexities of culture and settlement. It would not be wise to accept the findings of this study in an uncritical light; one interpretation alone can do little more than open the gates of inquiry, and, perhaps, record one facet of Alberta's vanishing cultural heritage. It is hoped, however, that this study has contributed towards an understanding and appreciation of a neglected aspect of Ukrainian folk culture in Alberta. It is to be regretted that, while the linquistic, literary, musical, and craft aspects of folk culture are carefully recorded, there has been scant interest in preserving a tangible expression of folk culture, which at one time touched the life of every Ukrainian pioneer of Alberta: the Ukrainian folk house.

FOOTNOTES

1. Peirce F. Lewis, "The Geography of Old Houses," Earth and Mineral Sciences, Vol. 39, No. 5, February 1970, p. 33.

2. Henry H. Glassie, "The Impact of the Georgian Form on American Folk Housing," in Forms Upon the Frontier, Austin and Alta Fife and Henry H. Glassie, eds., Utah State University, Monograph Series, Vol. XVI, No. 2, April 1969, Logan, Utah, p. 23. Much pioneering work in this field has been undertaken by geographers, notably by Fred Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 55, No. 4, 1965, pp. 549-577, and "Louisiana House Types," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 26, No. 4, 1936, pp. 179-193; J. E. Spenser, "House Types in Southern Utah," Geographical Review, Vol. 35, No. 3, 1945, pp. 444-457; Martin Wright, "The Antecedents of the Double Pen House Type," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 48, No. 2, 1958, pp. 109-117; and more recently by Richard V. Francaviglia, "Mormon Central-Hall Houses in the American West," Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Vol. 61, No. 1, 1971, pp. 65-71.

3. Allan Gowans, Looking at Architecture in Canada, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1958, p. 28.

4. Ibid. p. 25.

5. Lewis, op.cit. p. 33.

6. Ibid.

7. See William Darcovich, Ukrainians in Canada - The Struggle to Retain their Identity, Ukrainian Self Reliance Association, Ottawa, 1967, 38 pp.; N. J. Hunchak, Canadians of Ukrainian Origin, Series #1 (Population), Ukrainian-Canadian Committee, Winnipeg, 1947, 164 pp.; P. J. Lazarowich, "Ukrainian Pioneers in Western Canada," Alberta Historical Review, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1957, pp. 17-27; Vera Lysenko, Men in Sheepskin Coats, Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1947, 312 pp.; M. H. Marunchack, The Ukrainian Canadians: A History, Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, Winnipeg, 1970, 792 pp.; William Paluk, Canadian Cossacks, Canadian-Ukrainian Review Publishing Co. Ltd., Winnipeg, 1943, 251 pp.; J. F. C. Wright, "Ukrainian Canadians," Canadian Geographical Journal, Vol. 25, August 1942, pp. 74-87; and Paul Yuzyk, The Ukrainians in Manitoba, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1953, 232 pp.

8. See V. J. Kaye, Early Ukrainian Settlements in Canada 1895-1900, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1964, p. 129; Lysenko, op.cit. p. 39; J. G. MacGregor, Vilni Zemli: Free Lands, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1969, p. 22; Marunchak, op.cit. pp.83-4; and C. H. Young, The Ukrainian Canadians, Thomas Nelson and Sons, Toronto, 1931, pp. 102-3. Vernacular architectural traditions of Ukraine are treated comprehensively by V. P.

Samajlovych in "Architectural and Artistic Peculiarities of the Ukrainian National Dwelling", Ethnologia Slavica, Vol. 5, 1973, pp. 63-75, and in Ukrains'ke Narodne Zhytlo, (The Ukrainian Folk Dwelling) Naukova Dumka, Kiev, 1972, pp. 5-25.

9. Gilbert Parfitt, "Ukrainian Cottages", Architecture Canada, Vol. 18, August 1941, pp. 132-33.

10. Petro Kravchuk, "Pershi zhytla ukraintsiv u Kanadi", (The First Dwellings of Ukrainians in Canada) Narodna tvorchist'ta etnografiya, (Folk Art and Ethnography) No. 3, 1968, pp. 73-75.

11. See for example E. D. Wangenheim, "Problems of Research on Ukrainians in Eastern Canada", Slavs in Canada, Vol. 1, Edmonton, 1966, pp. 44-53 and W. B. Hurd, "Racial Origins and the Nativity of the Canadian People", Census Monograph 1931, Ottawa, 1931, pp. 567-9.

12. The preferred Ukrainian term for Galicia is Halychyna. The name Galicia is essentially of Polish origin and is regarded as an alien term by most Ukrainians. Halychyna is given here as a place name, but because no adjectival form of this term exists in English, the adjective Galician is used throughout.

13. Pers. comm., Harry Koncohrada, Beaverhill Pioneer Home, Lamont, Alberta, 5 June, 1972.

14. Pers. comm., Steve Mulka, Two Hills, Alberta, 31 May, 1972. See also Early Building in Saskatchewan, Norman Mackenzie Art Gallery, University of Saskatchewan, Regina, 1967.

15. Of over eighty examples of folk building examined during the course of this study only one was found to contain vertical timbering: a Galician-style house located on SE.14 Twp.53 R.18 W.4 of which the western half was vertically timbered, apparently a later addition to the horizontally timbered eastern section of the building.

16. The majority of all pioneer builders held strong views on the constituents of mud plaster, specifically concerning the type of animal dung added in order to impart cohesive properties and diminish cracking upon drying. It was generally found that the Galicians, and those of Galician ancestry, favoured the use of horse dung; the Bukowinians of cow dung. This difference may have originated in the type of draught animal commonly employed in their home province, as in Halychyna the horse was predominant, in Bukovyna, the ox. As a primary objective of the employment of animal dung was the achievement of cohesive properties, the Galicians deprecated the employment of cow dung as it failed to contain the amount of straw residue found in horse dung.

17. Pers. Comm., Mike Krykalowich, Harry Koncohrada and Frank Krill, Beaverhill Pioneer Home, Lamont, Alberta, 5 June 1972.

18. Pers. comm., Andrew Basisty, Andrew, Alberta, 6 June, 1972.

19. This was located in the smaller of two abandoned houses at Shepenge, Alberta on NE.22 Twp.55 R.13 W.4.

20. Pers. comm., Wasyl and Anne Zazula, Shandro, Alberta, 22 June, 1972, and Dorothy Gordeychuk, Sandy Lake, Alberta, 25 June, 1972.

21. There were exceptions, for example the Romanian style house on NE.30 Twp.56 R.13 W.4 was never given a coat of lime over its mud plaster.

22. The colours of the short-lived Ukrainian National State were blue, white, and yellow.

23. Alan Gowans, Building Canada, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1966, p. 191.

24. For details of Ukrainian settlement in Western Canada see MacGregor, op.cit. and Marunchack, op.cit. pp. 2-73. The best account of settlement after 1896 is given in Kaye, op.cit.

25. C. A. Weslager, The Log Cabin in America, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J. 1969, p. 89.

26. Pers. comm., Andrew Lamash, St. Michael, Alberta, 15 June, 1972; Dorothy Gordeychuk, Sandy Lake, Alberta, 25 June, 1972; and August Knysh, Andrew, Alberta, 3 June 1972. It should be noted, however, that such criticisms were leveled only at houses where the old brick or clay stove had been replaced by the modern iron stove.

27. Pers. comm., August Knysh, Andrew, 3 June, 1972.

28. Pers. comm., Steve Mulka, Two Hills, Peter Tymchuk, Two Hills, 31 May, 1972.

29. Miriam Elston, "The Russian in our Midst," (Journal and date unknown, copy in Provincial Archives, Edmonton).

30. The occupancy of the heavily wooded, poorer agricultural areas of the aspen parkland belt of the prairie provinces by Ukrainian settlers stemmed from their desire to secure ample timber supplies. In Halychyna and Bukovyna timber reserves were controlled by the aristocracy and the peasantry were forced to pay inflated prices for an essential resource. To the average peasant, therefore, timber was available only in limited quantities.

31. Miriam Elston, in "Ruthenians in Western Canada; Canadian Citizens from Russians," Onward, No. 21, April 26, 1919, supports this observation: ". . . most of the recently built houses are entirely Anglo-Saxon in design, well built and with sufficient windows."

HISTORIC SITES SERVICE
OCCASIONAL PAPERS

1. Ukrainian Vernacular Architecture in Alberta. Prepared by John Lehr. pp. 43. 1976.